

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

January/February 1994

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Maybe This Year...?

"I hardly know where to start," a recent letter begins. "My story is not one involving men. That's the problem. Male companionship seems not to be found, and, I fear, may never be found. They never ask me out twice. I'm always 'dumped.' The problem is *I want a relationship*. I have this overwhelming desire..."

Last evening in my living room someone said, "I fell deeply in love. He fell deeply in love, too—with someone else."

Another letter tells of the agonized yearning of one couple for a child. Since God has not removed the desire, they ask, may we not conclude that He wants us to employ whatever means we can (e.g. *in vitro* fertilization) in order to have a child?

God's not having taken away a perfectly normal human desire does not by any means indicate that we are free to pursue its fulfillment in any way we choose. A woman who had, after years of struggles, quickly lost sixty pounds told me that she had been expecting *God* to take away her appetite. When she realized He did not intend to do so (she had been asking for the removal of our God-given protection from starvation!), she stopped gratifying that appetite in the wrong ways.

Will the young woman find a mate? Will the couple have a child? Maybe 1994 will be the year of desire fulfilled. Perhaps, on the other hand, it will be the year of desire radically transformed, the year of finding, as we have perhaps not yet truly found, Christ to be the All-Sufficient One, Christ the "deep, sweet well of Love."

"Why won't God let someone into my life? I feel left out, abandoned. *When* will it be my turn?" The petulant letter goes on. "I feel deprived! Will He deny me the one small desire of my heart? Is it too big a treasure to ask? I sit in torture and dismay."

Life is likely to continue to hold many forms of torture and dismay for that unhappy person and for all who refuse to receive with thanksgiving instead of

complaint the place in life God has chosen for them. The torture is self-inflicted, for God has not rejected their prayers. He knows better than any of us do what furthers our salvation. Our true happiness is to be realized precisely *through* his refusals, which are always *mercies*. His choice is flawlessly contrived to give the deepest kind of joy as soon as it is embraced.

Joseph Eliot, in the seventeenth century, said, "I need everything God gives me, and want [or feel the lack of] nothing He denies me."

In Moses' review of God's leading of the children of Israel he said,

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart.... He humbled you, *causing* you to hunger and then fed you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known, to *teach* you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.... Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.... For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing. (Dt 8:2-3, 5, 7-9, NIV. Emphasis added.)

The cause of our discontent: we simply do not *believe* God. The wilderness experience leads to the Promised Land. It is the path God chose for us. His Word is established forever, and He tells us in a thousand ways that His will is our peace, His choices for us will lead to fulfillment and joy, the way of transgressors is hard. Do we suppose that *we* could find a better way than His?

One of George Eliot's characters says,

You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice; it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the

path of obedience. I say again, man cannot choose his duties. You may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth, and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty—bitter herbs, and no bread with them.

Instead of seeing His everlasting love, tenderly bending down to our humanness, longing over each one of us with a father's speechless longing, we sometimes think of Him as indifferent, inaccessible, or just plain unfair.

The worst pains we experience are not those of the suffering itself but of our stubborn resistance to it, our resolute insistence on our independence. To be "crucified with Christ" means what Oswald Chambers calls "breaking the husk" of that independence. "Has that break come?" he asks. "All the rest is pious fraud." And you and I know, in our heart of hearts, that that sword-thrust (so typical of Chambers!) is the straight truth.

If we reject *this* cross, we will not find it in this world again. *Here* is the opportunity offered. Be patient. Wait on the Lord for whatever He appoints, wait quietly, wait trustingly. He holds every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month in 1994 in His hands. Thank Him in advance for what the future holds, for He is already *there*. "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup" (NIV, Ps. 16:5). Shall we not gladly say, "I'll take it, Lord! YES! I'll trust you for everything. Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

His Grace Will Be Enough in 1994

The crosses of the present moment always bring their own special grace and consequent comfort with them; we see the hand of God in them when it is laid upon us. But the crosses of anxious foreboding are seen out of the dispensation of God; we see them without grace to bear them; we see them indeed through a faithless spirit which banishes grace. So, everything in them is bitter and unendurable; all seems dark and helpless. Let us throw self aside; no more self-interest, and then God's will, unfolding every moment in everything, will console us also every moment for all that He shall do around us, or within us, for our discipline.

—François de la Mothe Fénelon
(1651-1750)

The Splendor of God

I have just finished reading a biography (out of print) of Evelyn Underhill, who has been one of my great tutors in the spiritual life. Shortly before she died in 1941 she wrote, "We should think of the whole power and splendor of God as always pressing in on our small souls... but that power and splendor mostly reach us in homely inconspicuous ways; in the Sacraments, and in our prayers, joys, and sorrows and in all opportunities of loving service."

How easy it is to fail to recognize His "pressing in" on our small souls, calling us to self-abandonment and surrender. We would have no "problems" at all if we saw what God is up to. When Paul was in prison he never lost sight of the power and splendor of God, never forgot to write encouragement to his beloved churches, never stopped thanking and praising the Lord, reminding his correspondents in myriad ways that circumstances really don't matter at all. He did not see his imprisonment as a "problem," but as a means toward the furtherance of the gospel.

God help us to forget about how awful everything is and to thank Him for how wonderful are His power and splendor, how wonderful to be His child in 1994.

Prayer

"Defend and keep the soul of Thy little servant among so many perils of this corruptible life, and Thy Grace going with him, direct him by the way of peace to the country of everlasting clearness."

—Thomas à Kempis

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A Year Untried

A year untried before me lies,
What shall it bring of strange surprise?
Of joy or grief, I cannot tell,
but God my Father knoweth well.
I make it no concern of mine,
But leave it all with Love Divine.

Be sickness mine, or rugged health,
come penury to me or wealth;
Though lonesome I must pass along
or loving friends my way may throng;
Upon my Father's word I rest,
whatever shall be will be best.

No ill can come but He can cure,
His word doth all of good insure;
He'll see me through the journey's length,
for daily need give daily strength.
'Tis thus I fortify my heart,
And thus do fear and dread depart.

The sun may shed no light by day,
Nor stars at night illumine my way;
My soul shall still know no affright,
Since God is all my life and light.
Though all the earthly lamps grow dim,
He walks in light who walks with Him.

O year untried!—thou hast for me
Naught but my Father's eye can see,
Nor canst thou bring me loss or gain,
Or health or sickness, ease or pain,
But welcome messenger shall prove,
From Him whose Name to me is Love.

—R.M. Offord

For Prayer

- 1994 holds for us several overseas trips. We have the schedule only for the one to England (see Travel Schedule). Others are pending. Pray for divine guidance in all preparations. Things look so complicated from here, but, as Corrie ten Boom said, "God has no problems. Only plans."
- In January, Lord willing, we'll be with old (70s) missionary friends from Ecuador, Malcom and Mardelle Brown, who are still hard at work with

Spanish-speaking people on the Texas/Mexico border. They need your prayers. I look forward with joy to this trip—Mardelle was with me in my first attempt to reach an Auca woman, and came again when Valerie and I were living with the Aucas. She's a close friend, one of those "salt-of-the-earth" types you can't help loving. Pray for her and Malcom as they pour themselves out for those dear folks, pray for us as we join them briefly.

- Pray for continued grace and strength for that incredible woman, Phyllis Schlafly, who years ago (almost single-handedly, it seems) defeated the Equal Rights Amendment. She's still in there swinging—against abortion, government-controlled education, pornography, and everything Christians ought to deplore. She's for God, country, homeschooling, sexual purity, pro-life—in other words, she's visibly, unequivocally, perseveringly on the side of the angels. She's no "spring chicken" either—full of vitality. "Why do people get *tired*?" she said to me. "I'm not tired!" Pray for the grace of continuance—we need her!
- Please pray for more helpers to answer radio mail. Two wise servants of God, Alma Griffin, former missionary, and the Rev. Robert Peterson, a retired man who has volunteered his help for years, are coping valiantly and gladly; but the letters keep outdistancing them.

Natural Family Planning

There is a highly significant difference, I believe, between the various methods of contraception (mechanical, chemical, surgical, etc.) and what is called Natural Family Planning. The Bible tells us that children are a gift, a heritage, a blessing. Does this mean that a couple ought to produce as many children as are biologically possible? Is it legitimate to make use of a method God built into the reproductive system? Each couple whose united desire is to please the Lord should confront these hard questions in His presence, offering themselves in obedience to His answer.

NFP, the practice of achieving or avoiding pregnancies according to an informed awareness of a woman's fertility, is worth careful consideration. It's an *art*, not just another birth control technique; med-

Travel Schedule January–July 1994

January 13–14 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

January 15 San Fernando Valley, CA; Patti Thompson, (818) 341-8484.

January 27 Brownsville, TX; Baptist Student Union, Mrs. Malcom Brown, (210) 543-0317.

January 27–30 Brownsville, TX; KBNR Radio, Mrs. Malcom Brown, (210) 543-0317.

February 6 South Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Seminary, World Christian Fellowship, Elizabeth Evans, (508) 468-5030.

February 19–March 7 Tour in England, auspices of Saltmine Trust, 0902-881080.

March 19 Akron, OH; Moody Seminar, Mrs. Jo' McCarthy, (312) 329-4000.

March 26 South Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Robert Freeman, (508) 468-7111.

April 9 Grand Junction, CO; Redlands Community Church, Sharon Gross, (303) 245-9020 or 8071.

April 22–24 La Jolla, CA; Women's retreat, Cindy Travisano, (714) 581-5391 or 770-3147.

May 7 Syracuse, NY; Radio rally, Gordon Bell, (315) 469-5051.

May 14 Harrisburg, PA; Home Schoolers' Fair, Kim Huber, (717) 653-8892.

May 19–30 Ecuador, South America.

June 7 Peterboro, NH; Pregnancy Resource Center, Beth Cutaiar, (603) 924-8788.

June 24–26 NC, E's 50th high school reunion.

NFP continued from page 3

ically safe, healthy, highly effective, morally acceptable, and, through mutual agreement, self-restraint, and sacrifice, often greatly *strengthens* a marriage. I think it's worth thinking—and praying—about.

For information: The Couple to Couple League (a non-profit organization dedicated to providing NFP services throughout the world) P.O. Box 111184, Cincinnati, OH 45211, (513) 661-7612.

Keep in Touch

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